

...AND FRIENDS

by

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Walking toward my locker after my last period class I saw my best friend across the Senior lawn.

"Hey Ed, have you heard about Jenny?"

"What?!"

"I said, have you heard about Jenny?"

"No what?"

"I hear she's hanging out with the 'Jesus Freaks' at lunch and stuff."

"So?"

"So... so I thought you might be interested."

He turned away and shuffled his feet in some sand on the walkway, pretending not to care. He and I had fought over her since we first met her last year at the 8th grade graduation dance. Ed went out with her all that summer. But when the Fall came she decided that she needed a ^{*}change.

"Will you talk to her for me?"

I was caught off guard, "Yeah..sure... About what?"

"You know, about... well about us."

"Us?"

"You know, about her and ^{me} I."

"Oh, you had me worried there for a moment."

We closed our lockers and headed back over toward the Senior lawn. Ed tapped my shoulder and pointed at the local "J.F."s as we passed the Senior lawn.

"Okay, I'll talk to her."

why -
*this is confusing
because the
nader thinks
you're going out
with her,
at first

They looked like any other group of high school students except for their ever-present "plastic" smiles, as a parish priest once pointed out to me. Meekly sitting in a circle of song, they appeared pretty harmless to me.

"Jenny?"

"Oh, hi Joe."

"Hi. Whacha doin'?"

"Not a whole lot. Whacha want?"

"I just came to...to see...uh...whacha readin'?"

"Oh, the Bible. Wanta hear some?"

"Well, no not rea..."

"This is something I read this morning. It's in John chapter fifteen:

This is My commandment that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves; for the slave does not know what his master is doing but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

"That's nice. I kinda wanted to ta..."

"Arc you Jesus' friend Joe?"

"...Uh..well, actually I came to talk to you about..."

"Joe, it isn't that bad. Why don't you give Him a chance. There's nothing wrong with becoming a Christian."

"Listen Jen', I'm already a Christian, I go to church and stuff, so don't worry. I came to talk to you about..."

"It's not the same!"

"I came to talk to you about Ed! He still really likes you!"

"Oh," she lowered her voice and began to scan through the grass for a thought she had dropped, "Did he say that himself?"

"No, but he....oh forget it!" Perhaps she wanted to tell me that she felt the same about him. But her lips did not make a sound as I got up and left. And none of the others seemed to notice. They just continued singing with their arms around each, swaying to the music. I'm glad that Ed did not wait for me.

Jenny and her "It's not the same" Christianity --- I never could understand her. One time at a high school C.C.D meeting a friend asked the priest what he felt about the "Jesus Freaks." (This was back in 1972 when the "Jesus Movement" had just begun to branch out from Laguna Beach and into Mission Viejo). He said, rather vaguely, that he felt that "They're pretty good people but they limit themselves too much by identifying with the title 'Jesus Freak' or 'Jesus Person.'" I know some people ^{who} ~~that~~, after six years, are still trying to figure out what he meant.

Ed and I, on the other hand, maintained a basically passive approach to religion. But every once in awhile our passivism took on an active tense. For example, toward the beginning of our sophomore year in high school we decided (in matters religious the word "decided" is often synonymous with "compelled") to take part in a religious experience that was sweeping Southern California. No, Jenny's arguments had not convinced us to get involved with "It's not the same" Christianity or the Charismatic move-

ment. Our mothers had "convinced" us to go on a "Reach-Out" retreat.

This retreat was given in the San Bernadino Mountains by a group of volunteers out of the secondary education department of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. We were told that this retreat would be different from all of our preconceived ideas. So it did not shock us when we found that most of our weekend in the mountains would be spent in hikes through the woods and ping-pong games in the lodge. But beyond the exterior arrangement of ping-pong games and nature hikes was the growing awareness that He was there.

By the end of the weekend I had won five games of ping-pong and lost about eight. Ed, well, I lost track of him after we were introduced to a group of girls from St. Bonaventure High School. But even Ed, preoccupied with girls, left the mountain with the same feeling that I had.

Here we had all these years exercised a legitimate amount of righteousness, having been both altar boys and boyscouts (the epitome of "All-American Boyhood"), yet we found ourselves out of touch with God. We had always "believed" in Him, but He was not a "he" in our lives, just another distant "it." Maybe what Jenny had been telling us about needing to be God's friend had a certain amount of truth to it. But for us now was not the time to find out.

When we got back to school Monday morning with our psuedo-religious feeling we were met with an unexpected barrage of questions from Ed's friend, Dave.

this sounds as if it meant something serious to you

and this contradicts that!

confusing.

"What's that?"

"What's what?"

"That thing that you and Joe have on your shirt?"

"It's called an Ichthys pin. It's from our retreat."

"Oh... are you guys 'Jesus Freaks' now?"

"uh..." I hesitated.

"Well why don't you guys just mosey on over there and sit with the other 'J.F.'s?"

Ed and I looked across the walkway at Jenny and her friends as they performed their daily ritual of singing and basic chumminess. "...They limit themselves by identifying with the title 'Jesus Freak' or 'Jesus Person.'"

"That's okay, I'll pass." I quickly diverted their attention to a more comfortable subject. "Hey Ed, isn't that Lisa. That girl that you have the hots for?"

"Lisa!" Dave and I called to her across campus. " You know Ed here really would like to get to know you!" Poor Ed, she did not seem overly interested.

While I was able to maintain my image in front of Ed and my other friends I could not hide from myself the fact that I needed to find out more about this "friend of God" stuff. I could not isolate my experience in the mountains from the rest of my life like Ed was doing.

One day while pouring over those famous magazines subtitled "Entertainment for Men," during one of our weekly excursions to the local drug store, I began to get a little disgusted with what I was doing. I confessed to Ed, "I've gotta quit looking at

this stuff." He just gave me a wierd look and shrugged off the thought.

"Whatever."

"Whatever?! You might be able to say 'Whatever,'" I thought, "but I'm going to find out what's going on here!" I started my odyssey by reading the New Testament. Nice book --- the New Testament--- but not a word of it made any sense to me, so I stopped reading it. It was then only a matter of time until I found myself with Ed and the magazines.

Around Christmas time of that year, 1973, I began going out with a girl named Lynn. ^{Since it was} Being my first real relationship with a girl, I set my sights on getting as much out of ^{it} ~~this re-~~ ~~lationship~~ as I could. So I told God to go away. He did not obey me.

I thought that things were going rather smoothly. Then one afternoon Lynn told me, "Don't call me until after six."

"How come?"

"'Cause a friend is coming over."

"Anyone I know?"

"Nope. Her name's Valerie, she's a teacher for the Jeho... uh... I mean, she's a teacher-friend of mine."

"Oh." I soon found out that Valerie was a Jehovah's Witness. It seems that Lynn's old boyfriend, Tim, had made Lynn promise to study the Jehovah's Witness Faith for a month. I did not know too much about the "J.W"s except that, according to my mom, they do not salute the flag or serve in any of the Armed Forces and that they do not think that there was enough room in heaven for

everyone.

"Lynn, these guys... they're not telling the truth."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know, their doctrines are pretty wierd. Hey, why don't you come to church with me?"

For a couple of Sundays she took me up on my offer. Unfortunately sermons on Catholic morality did not mix very well with petting in the park. So I soon found myself making resolutions, "Okay, we'll stop screwing around." But the words did not carry any real weight.

It is not that I did not want to stop petting, because I did; I knew that her feelings were being hurt and that she was beginning to feel used. But the temptation added to the emerging growth of our sex-drives made these resolutions meaningless.

This time I did not turn to the Bible or the Church. I just existed from promise to promise. I was like a stumbling wanderer in the desert dreaming about water and only finding sand. Pushing aside the fact that I was parched, life went on.

One evening in February I received a phone call from Greg, a friend ^{whom} ~~that~~ I had met before my retreat in October. He told me that I had been selected to go on a special retreat in April for people interested in giving retreats.

"Sure I'd love to go."

"Great, then I'll sign you up. By the way, are you doin' anything Monday night?"

"Not that I know of. Why?"

"'Cause I'd like to know if you'd want to go to a Bible

study that I'm teaching at the..." Bible study, no way, I can't, I've got to get out of this one! "...at the Webber's house. You remember the Webbers, don't you?"

"..Uh..yeah, I'd love to but...but I think I have to do dishes Monday."

"Oh."

"Sorry, maybe next time."

The last thing that I remember telling Lynn before I left for the retreat was, "I don't really know what this is all about but I've gotta live for God." I had no idea what I was saying but it sounded like the right ^{thing} to say at the time.

On the retreat, the mountains, the overcast sky, and the warm fireplace in the lodge set my mind at ease. Greg brought me a cup of tea and asked me how it was going. I was totally speechless. I found myself being an observer, taking in the warmth and the calmness that surrounded me. I knew that He was there, but I could not put my finger on it.

During one of the talks Saturday afternoon one of the retreat leaders said, "You need to make God more important in your life. Read the Bible, spend time meditating on stuff like the Sacraments. Eventually, instead of seeing Him as way out there, you'll see him kind of like at roof level." But that was not what I wanted. I knew that there had to be something else.

Before we left the mountain, Greg again asked me if I wanted to go to his Bible study. This time I agreed .

he spoke
like that ? ? ?

I had been to Greg's Bible study once or twice before, so I was fairly used to the endless song singing and tongue speaking. I also became reacquainted with the vicious battle to stay awake during the Bible study. The concluding prayer became a welcome sight.

The concluding prayer this evening included petitions by the people gathered. The way this was done was that anyone that had a need would express that need. Then everyone would form a circle around that person, laying on hands and praying for the person and the need.

They were praying for a girl named Debbie. I joined in with this prayer, closing my eyes and going along with what was being said. About half way through the prayer I opened my eyes. Just as I opened my eyes Greg opened his eyes and smiled at me. I immediately shut my eyes thinking, "What's going on here?"

When Debbie returned to her place in the circle Greg turned to me and said, "Joe, the Lord spoke to my heart and said that He has power for you, the power to overcome all those things that've been getting you down. Would you like to receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?"

"Sure."

For the next fifteen minutes or so they petitioned God to send his Spirit. Just then the shepherd approached me in the wilderness and pressed a wooden ~~lad~~le filled with cool water against my lips while wiping the sand from my feet. I now knew.

No longer do I call you slaves; for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known to you.

John 15:15

for -

What ever happened to Jenny - you bring her up, then drop her. And Ed?

What about hymn?

You get my point? Too many loose ends.

You bring in a lot of characters - all somehow connected & take it, with your developing religious sensibilities - but you leave them hanging: not only an aesthetic error, but a moral one as well.

What you need to do is shape this material into a coherent, fully developed and "explained" narrative.